

BOOK WORLD

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McNamara: technocrat or statesman?

THE ESSENCE OF SECURITY: Reflections in Office. By Robert S. McNamara. Harper & Row. 176 pp. \$4.95.

By Dean Acheson

Secretary McNamara's book comes at a most appropriate moment. It is subtitled "Reflections in Office" and contains those theorems regarding our place and purposes in the world on the basis of which he guided, directed and shaped the vast activities of our security system through two Administrations. Except for General Marshall I do not know of any department head who, during the half century I have observed government in Washington, has so profoundly enhanced the position, power and security of the United States as Mr. McNamara. This alone gives importance to his thoughts, his appraisals of our relations with "the vast external realm" and the conclusions he draws from the experience of seven years.

The time makes them more important still. We are engaged in the trying task of choosing what General Washington liked to call our Chief Magistrate. It behooves us to heed plain truths about the world and its problems through which he will have to lead us. Candidates for the office rarely enlighten us upon them. In such a case, reflections of one leaving office are rather more valuable than of those seeking it. As the author of the First Book of Kings wisely observed, "Let not him that girdeth on his harness boast himself as he that putteth it off."

Finally, this book is important for what it reveals about a remarkable man. Mr. McNamara is not the human computer of current myth, the animated slide rule, the walking statistical compendium. He is a rare combination of sensitivity, perception and toughness. Chapter Seven, "On Gaps and Bridges" — including the generation gap — reveals a man whom very few

people know and whom many should know.

McNamara's book is divided into three parts of three chapters each — "This World We Live In," "The Tools of Power" and "Where Security Lies." The first of these is a clear-headed description of the situation in which we find ourselves with its dangers and its opportunities, the potentialities and the limitations of our influence beyond our borders — that is, our ability to affect the conduct of others by our own conduct — and

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an account of how we have used it. A reading of these three chapters, less than fifty pages, will bring light to troubled citizens who are getting a combination of jumbled history, calls for general retreat and inspirational rhetoric. It will also be comforting to know that for so long a time the Pentagon was guided by a man who saw the world and the problems it presents to our country as McNamara saw them. During his tenure of office his critics asserted that, while he was a master of those elements in judgment that could be fed into a computer, he was impervious to what they called the imponderables. A reading of Chapter Three on "NATO and the Forces of Change" will call for amendment of that criticism.

The chapter on "Where Interests Collide" is especially recommended to "disaffected intellectuals," who have had a bellyful of force and insist that it has no place in the conduct of our foreign affairs. We can all wish that this were so; and it might be if the rest of this



globe were as remote from us and as uninhabited as (perhaps) the rest of our universe. However, the latest psychiatry and anthropology cast doubt on even this theoretical hope by their suggestion that human aggressiveness is as legitimate an inheritance as the later-developed doctrine of the golden rule. McNamara's policies for controlling, limiting and deterring the use of force are more appealing to me than reliance upon such diaphanous hopes as the nonproliferation treaty, which get support from the very public and congressional circles that have been so critical of McNamara's more sturdy approach.

Part Two, "Tools of Power," deals simply and understandably with two matters essential to enhancing the chances of our survival in a world situation from which, despite efforts in which this country has been the leader, force has not been excluded, and into which the possibility of using ultimate force, in the form of nuclear weapons, has entered. *(Continued on page 3)*

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(Continued from page 1) More specifically, in this part McNamara deals with the most effective means for the deterrence of nuclear aggression and at a cost that will still make possible the achievement of our domestic goals. What has been called "cost effectiveness" is a rigorous and penetrating critique of the use of dollars in the various projects put forward by the services.

Only a little exaggeration is involved in describing the pre-McNamara military budgets thus: the civilian heads of the service slashed all requests in order to bring the total figure within limits thought consistent with desired tax and fiscal policy. This amount was then divided by three — a third for each service — and sent to Congress. There a bitter, public interservice war would break out, with each service calling upon its traditional supporters, as in the case of the "Revolt of the Admirals" against President Truman and Secretary Johnson in 1949. This civil war usually resulted in some of the requests being restored. McNamara's methods outraged the military and congressional advocates of this system.

Secretary McNamara's views upon the desirable pol-

icies for our military establishment and the methods essential to make them effective, clearly and understandably set out in Part Two, urgently call for understanding by the public and press if either expects to affect in any way these major decisions of public policy. Both are too often content with asserting loudly the need for civilian control over the military and lambasting those who attempt to exert it. Professional soldiers, they say, are supposed to know more about military matters than civilians and should be given what they say they need.

Part Three — "Where Security Lies" — portrays the deep humanity of this remarkable man in his understanding of the profound effect upon national security and domestic tranquility of factors other than force and power. Anyone recalling his address to the American Society of Newspaper Editors in Montreal in May 1966, which forms the basis of the last chapter, should not have been surprised by his enthusiasm for the work of the International Bank. In this chapter he develops the relation between low per capita income and violence. Of the 38 nations with incomes of less than \$100 per

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capita per annum, 32 had experienced outbreaks of violence twice in the past eight years. Of the 27 having over \$750, only one had such an experience. In the middle range, 69 per cent of the poor and 48 per cent of the middle-income-group countries had gone through a violent upheaval. The outlook for violence in the southern hemisphere seems ominous to McNamara. A dollar's worth of military hardware will, he believes, buy less security for the well-to-do nations than a dollar's worth of developmental assistance.

Robert McNamara in this book reveals himself as a temperate optimist. He believes man is

a rational animal, but with a nearly infinite capacity for folly. . . . He draws blueprints for Utopia but never quite gets it built. In the end, he plugs away obstinately with the only building material really ever at hand: his own part-comic, part-tragic, part-cussed, part-glorious nature. I, for one, would not count a global free society out. Coercion, after all, merely captures man. Freedom captivates him.

Further, a reviewer must not go. Each owes it to himself to read Mr. McNamara, not a digest of him. ☞